

FALL 2020

JAMES MAGNUSON

VANESSA GUIGNERY ON JULIAN BARNES

BILLY COLLINS

Ransom

center
MAGAZINE

ELI REED
BLACK IN
AMERICA



A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

WHEN WILL THINGS GET BACK TO NORMAL, everyone wants to know. Increasingly, the question on our minds is whether getting back to normal should be the goal. To put it in other words, what can we learn from this extended closure? Could this time of disruption also be a time of reflection, of reassessment, and even of growth?

With the sudden closure this past spring, researchers and fellows were sent home, just as borders were closing and travel restrictions were being put in place. Classes moved online. Our galleries went dark, tours stopped, and all in-person programs were cancelled. We worked to bring home collections that were on exhibition in South Africa and in Germany, and all Ransom Center staff began working from home.

Remote research continued, however, albeit at a slower pace, and with the return of a limited number of students in the fall, online instruction resumed. As the emergency closure has stretched on, our attention has turned to the delivery of online programs that can reach audiences far beyond Austin.

The creative thinking that the Ransom Center staff are engaged in holds great promise for transforming our online services to students, to researchers, to exhibition visitors and program audiences. The lessons that we are learning in this challenging time, and the adjustments we are making, have the potential to extend the Ransom Center's reach in significant and lasting ways.



In the meantime, I wish the whole Ransom Center community health, wellness, and a continuing rich cultural life which we are grateful to participate in.

STEPHEN ENNISS

Betty Brumbalow Director, Harry Ransom Center

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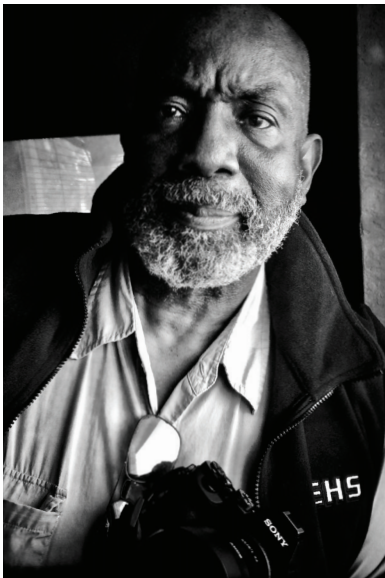
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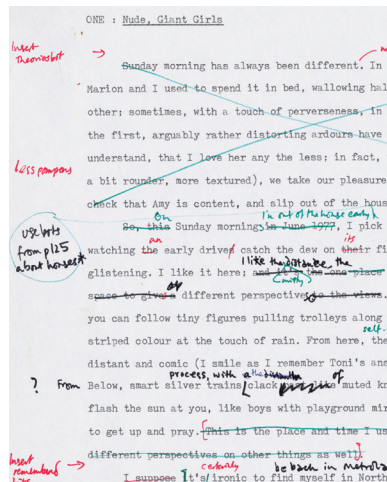
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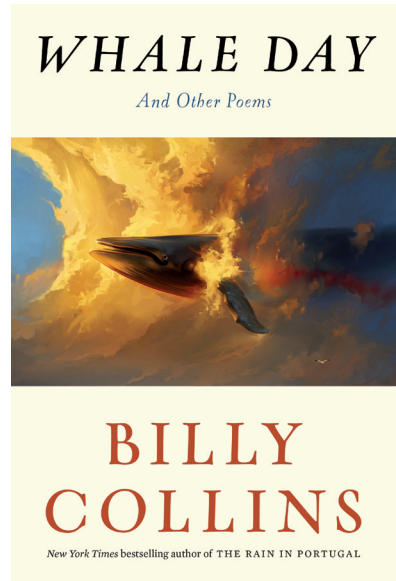
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RESEARCH

WHAT IS RESEARCH?

AN EXERCISE IN SLOW RESEARCH

THE RANSOM CENTER'S RESEARCH DIVISION will devote this coming academic year to a basic question: "What is Research?" Research is a common activity that unites and underscores much of academic life. Each discipline practices and communicates research differently: across critical and creative methods, interpreted through qualitative and quantitative frameworks, performing from libraries to laboratories, supported by different funding structures, professional practices, and networks.



Despite differences, research shares a common aim: never satisfied with answers, it asks new questions. At the Ransom Center—which is inherently interdisciplinary—research acts as a heartbeat that pulses new life into our collections. By asking a basic question—"What is Research?"—we hope to expose porous spaces between our practices that lead researchers, faculty, students, staff, and the public to interpret the collections. The process of asking this question will hopefully reveal intersections and tensions, which become opportunities for future work.

In the coming months across publication outlets, on our blog and on social media, different contributors will share their practices in and around the Ransom Center through the lens of "What is Research?" The conversation will unfold slowly; during that time, we remain mindful of layered meanings of slowness. This exercise will not be neat as traditional scholarship, but rather messy with different points of access. We hope to spur a conversation around research, opening more relationships between collections and communities.

Please join this slow conversation at [#ransomresearch](#) on our social media channels and let us know: What is Research to You? We hope to hear from you—stay tuned!

NEWS

HENDERSON JOINS CENTER AS NEW ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR FOR RESEARCH



DR. GRETCHEN HENDERSON HAS BEEN chosen as the Ransom Center's new Associate Director for Research through an international search. She will develop scholarly initiatives and programs in support of the Center's research mission.

Prior to joining the Ransom Center, Henderson held appointments in the Department of English at Georgetown University, in the Humanities at the University of California-Santa Cruz, and as the Annie Clark Tanner Fellow in Environmental Humanities and Writing at the University of Utah. In 2018-2019, she served as co-director of the National Endowment for the Humanities Institute on Museums: Humanities in the Public Sphere.

Henderson's writings—including four books and arts media and opera libretti—have been reviewed in *The New Yorker*, *The Guardian*, *Times Literary Supplement*, and *Time* magazine. She has taught widely with libraries and museums and at a number of universities, including Georgetown University, the University of Utah, and MIT. Her work also has been shaped by research fellowships and artist residencies, including her time spent this past year as a writer-in-residence at the Jan Michalski Foundation for Writing and Literature in Switzerland.



Magnum Project Preservation Specialist Rebecca Wells working during the project to house more than 150,000 prints from the Magnum Photos, Inc., Photography Collection.

IN THE ARCHIVES

HOUSING THE MAGNUM PHOTOS, INC. PHOTOGRAPHY COLLECTION

FOUNDED IN 1947, MAGNUM PHOTOS, INC. IS A COOPERATIVE AGENCY made up of world-renowned photographers whose visual storytelling captures the dynamic reality of the world, its events, and its people through a unique combination of photojournalism and art.

The Ransom Center's Magnum photography collection of nearly 200,000 press prints from its New York bureau is a vital illustration of the human experience. The collection has been highly requested since it was donated by Michael and Susan Dell, Glenn and Amanda Fuhrman, and John and Amy Phelan in 2013. Works of its many photographers, including Robert Capa, Susan Meiselas, Josef Koudelka, Elliott Erwitt, and Eli Reed (see the article, *The Camera as a Weapon Against Racial Injustice: Eli Reed's Black in America*, on page 4), have enhanced educational and research experiences and in classrooms, galleries, and the reading room.

Due to the importance of the photographs and the interest shown by students and researchers, the Center prioritized housing to improve safe handling and storage of the collection. The project required more than 100 hours of conservation treatments and nearly two years of dedicated work by Magnum Project Preservation Specialist Rebecca Wells and the project team to house approximately 150,000 prints. The new housing protects the photographs from dust and abrasion, and ensures safe and easy viewing of the photographs without excessive handling. A revamped finding aid, with augmented descriptions of context and arrangement and a more granular folder-level container list, will be fully accessible and searchable on the Center's website. The new housings, coupled with the enhanced finding aid, will improve access and reduce handling of the photographs to improve discovery and long-term preservation of the collection.

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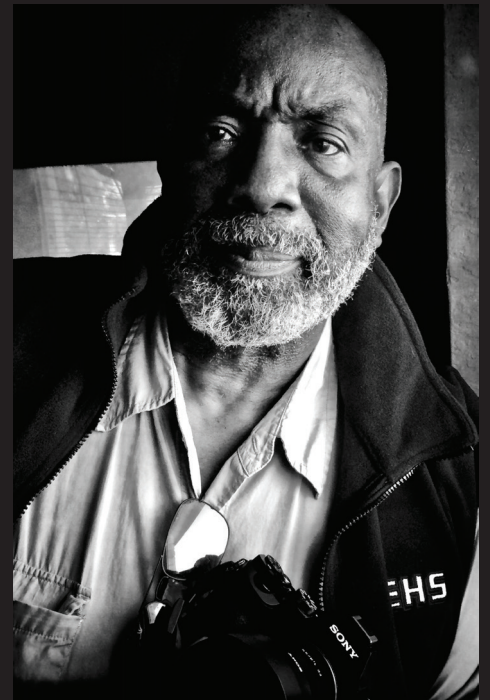
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ABOVE: Eli Reed, *Funeral of Yusef Hawkins, Brooklyn, New York City, 1989*. Image courtesy of Magnum Photos, Inc. © Eli Reed/Magnum Photos; OPPOSITE: Portrait of Eli Reed by Elizabeth Hurley.

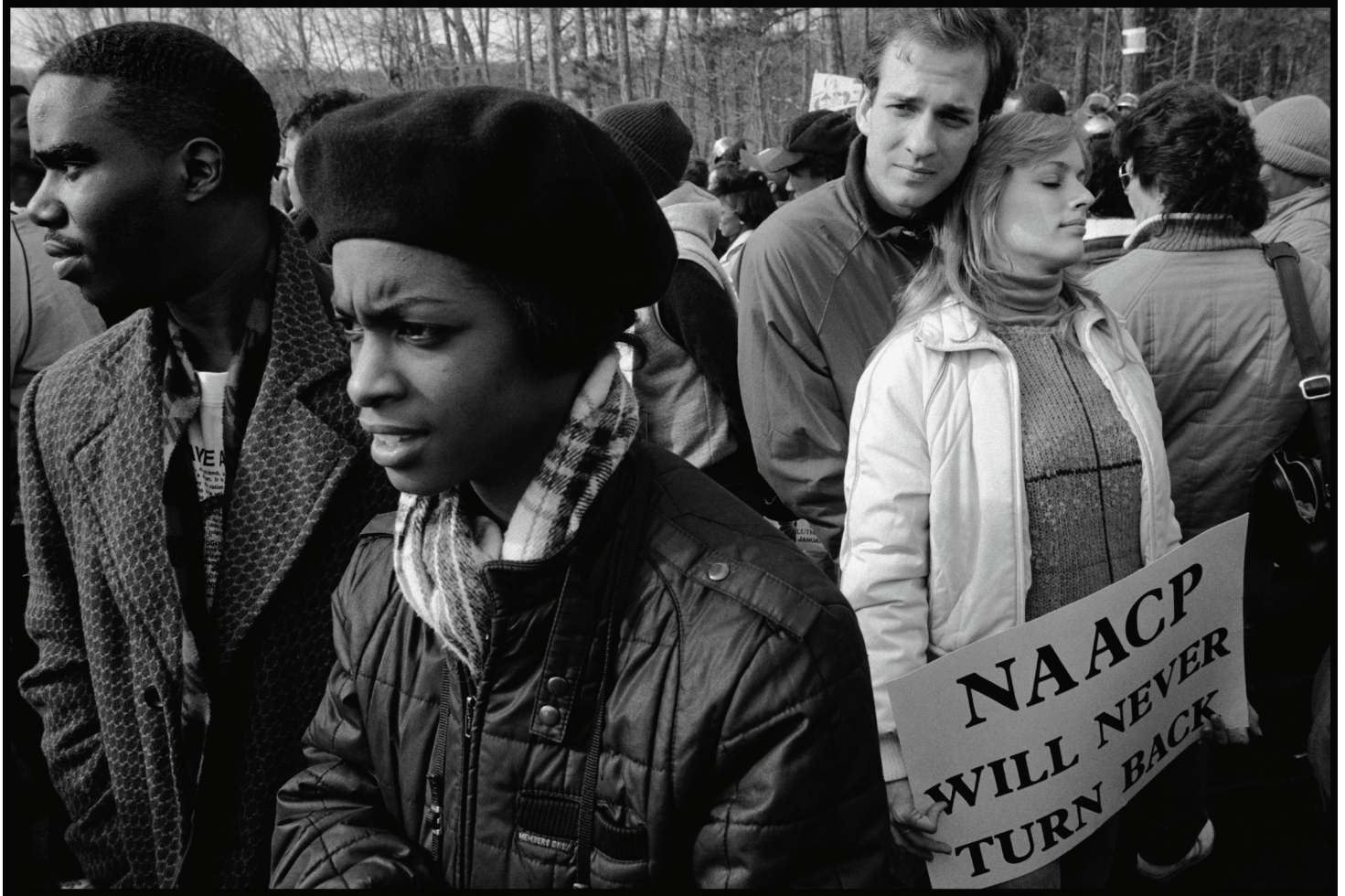
**THE CAMERA
AS A WEAPON
AGAINST
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ELI REED'S
*BLACK IN
AMERICA***



▼
BY STEVEN HOELSCHER

D

uring the hot summer months of 2020, especially in the weeks following the May 25th killing of George Floyd while in police custody, the Magnum Photos, Inc. Photography Collection was often on my mind. The scenes of protest that we witnessed, in countless cities across the United States and the world, reminded me of the iconic Civil Rights Movement images that Magnum's photographers created. Burt Glinn in 1957 Little Rock, Eve Arnold at the 1961 Black Muslim rally, Danny Lyon at 1963 SNCC sit-ins, Leonard Freed at the 1963 March on Washington, Bruce Davidson at the 1965 Selma march: These images, and many more, documented the epic Black struggle to achieve greater social justice, a struggle that so obviously continues.



Eli Reed, *Anti-Racism March, Forsyth County, Georgia, 1987*. Image courtesy of Magnum Photos, Inc. © Eli Reed/Magnum Photos

The value of these historical images is immeasurable; they help form the raw material of the Civil Rights Movement's historical memory. Perhaps that's why these photographs—taken more than a half century ago—also seem to be from another world. Between then, an era defined by legal segregation and voter suppression, and our own moment of protest against police violence and systemic racism, are the images of another Magnum photographer, Eli Reed. And it is to his work that I've turned—especially his ongoing, self-assigned project, *Black in America*—to provide visual context to what we were seeing on the streets of Minneapolis and beyond.

Reed has been with Magnum since 1983, becoming a full member in 1988. He joined the faculty of The University of Texas at Austin as a clinical professor of photojournalism in 2005, when we first met. An accomplished, award-winning photojournalist, Reed has covered world news events for leading publications such as *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *The Washington Post*, *Time*, *Stern*, and many more. His documentation of life and conflicts in Central America, the Middle East,

and Africa is especially well known, as is his work as a still photographer for major motion pictures. "My personal journey on this long road has been a meditation about what it means to be a human being," he writes in the preface to his recent retrospective publication, *A Long Walk Home*. "I have tried to capture the complicated beauty and reality of life in a visual form."

It is often noted that Reed was the first Black photographer to become a member of Magnum. "By signing him on," Gordon Parks observed, "the agency granted loftiness to its own existence." Parks was right, of course. What Reed brought to Magnum was not just diversity in the agency's labor pool, but a perspective that helped him make photographs unlike those of his white peers. This may have been welcome within Magnum (Reed counts many of its members as his closest friends and mentors), but the publishing world sometimes balked. "You're too close to the subject," he often heard from magazine editors when he approached them with photographs of Black life—a perception that reflected the structural racism that Reed encountered throughout his career.

“White people don’t know the biases that surround Black people all the time,” he recently told me as he reflected on that racism. With words that echo the sentiment of civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer, he said “I’m tired of being tired from it all.” In this way, Reed empathizes with many of his photographic subjects, and in doing so bestows upon them a dignity and understanding that comes with many shared experiences. Reed’s humane empathy is fueled by an anger about the injustice that he witnessed. “His soul, firmly locked into black problems, fuels his indignation, compels his eye to listen to his heart,” Parks found in his protégé’s work. Deploying a metaphor that Parks used for himself, he noted that, for Reed, “his camera becomes a weapon against hardships black people war against every day.”

That activist impulse is present throughout *Black in America*, published by W. W. Norton in 1997, a good portion of which is available in the recently housed Magnum Photos, Inc. Photography Collection at the Ransom Center. One sees it, for example, in the photograph of two couples, one Black and one white, at the 1987 Anti-Racism march in Forsyth County, Georgia. The demonstration, which drew an estimated 12,000

MY PERSONAL
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—ELI REED

to 20,000 people, was one of the largest civil rights protests since the Selma to Montgomery march, led by Martin Luther King, Jr. more than two decades earlier. The northern Georgia county was notorious for unabashed white supremacy, including its attack, one week earlier, on a small, peaceful interracial “walk for brotherhood.” In response, people from across the state and country descended on Forsyth County. Reflecting on the photograph in the context of the recent protests that have rocked cities across the nation, Reed was struck by seeing “people of all races together, extremely concerned about what is happening in the U.S. They saw in these moments... the fact that we are living in deep waters capable of drowning our collective hopes and dreams.”



Eli Reed, *At Spelman College Graduation, Atlanta, Georgia, 1993*. Image courtesy of Magnum Photos, Inc.



© Eli Reed/Magnum Photos



Eli Reed, *Harlem Street Scene, New York City, 1987*. Image courtesy of Magnum Photos, Inc. © Eli Reed/Magnum Photos

The promise of interracial solidarity should never be assumed, Reed's photographs also show us; white-on-black violence is too deeply embedded within the nation's DNA. Two years later, in his 1989 photograph of Yusef Hawkins's funeral, we see the closeup of a young man's face as he looks past the photographer. "I was as upset and angry as the man holding onto the back door of the hearse," Reed recently said of the photograph. "I was tired of African American men basically being lynched with guns, cars, or sticks because they had black skin." The anger shared by Reed and the unnamed young man arose from the brutal killing of Hawkins at the hands of a group of young white men and fueled the outrage that the "storm over Brooklyn" sparked across the city.

It's not just national news events, like these or the 1995 Million Man March, that attracted Reed's attention. A good portion of Reed's work shows, he says, how the "fortunes of Black folk rise and fall in the quiet daily struggle for existence," including the quiet moments of celebration and joy, like graduation from Spelman College, the historically Black liberal arts college in Atlanta. Or, take his photograph of the 1987 Harlem street scene, with children playing on an abandoned car. It's easy to see why the photograph has become one of his most

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—GORDON PARKS, REFLECTING ON
THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF ELI REED

frequently reproduced images: Youthful playfulness and defiance seem to overcome the neighborhood's poverty. It's the kind of image that I believe Reed anticipated would move his project forward, one in which he hoped "would form an inspiring overview of one chapter in our struggle for equality in America."

Few photographs, to my eye, are more inspiring than Reed's 1984 picture of the groom and ring bearer in Beaufort, South Carolina. The look, as Reed puts it, of "unabashed admiration" on the little boy's face makes it seem as though he "was gently being given lessons from life directly to his little heart." And what are those lessons? Most surely, that racism runs through the course of America's veins, but also that justice sometimes prevails. One would never come to that conclusion by simply looking at the photograph, of course, or by reading its minimal caption. But when one learns that the groom is Lenell Geter, who, as a 25-year-old aerospace engineer, was falsely charged two years earlier for a petty crime that he did not commit, the photograph takes on deeper meaning. Geter's conviction by an all-white jury in Greenville, Texas, led to his sentencing of life in prison. His conviction was overturned, but only after the NAACP took up the case and national media pressured local authorities to review the evidence for his innocence.

Reed finds that the hope expressed early in his project has diminished over the years, as he witnessed how "African Americans were still treated with the grudging tolerance that a master reserves for his servant." But he has also not given in to despair, and it's through his work that he tries to bring about change, a perspective that he still embodies. Thus, two weeks after George Floyd's brutal killing, Reed attended his funeral in Houston, Texas, documenting the tremendous range of Black expressions of grief, sorrow, and anger. "In lieu of photographing Floyd," writes Chaédria LaBouvier, "Reed's camera tenderly captures the minutiae of people, in the middle of a pandemic, social collapse, and a revolution, willing themselves to bear witness." Read this way, the photographs illustrate resilience and Black subjectivity. They also exemplify Reed's belief that serious change of the sort necessary to address systemic racism does not happen overnight or without effort.

"Don't just sit there and accept it," Reed says. "Speak through your work. Say something." **R**

Dr. Steven Hoelscher is Professor of American Studies and Geography at The University of Texas at Austin and Faculty Curator at the Harry Ransom Center.



Eli Reed, *Groom with Ring Bearer, Beaufort, South Carolina, 1984*. Image courtesy of Magnum Photos, Inc. © Eli Reed/Magnum Photos



PHOTO: Courtesy of the Michener Center for Writers

JAMES MAGNUSON

A Literary Life & Legacy

▼
BY GREGORY CURTIS

The Ransom Center recently acquired the archive of a vitally important literary figure. James Magnuson is a widely respected author. He has published nine well-received novels, won awards while writing for the movies and for television, and has seen so many of his plays produced that he has lost count.



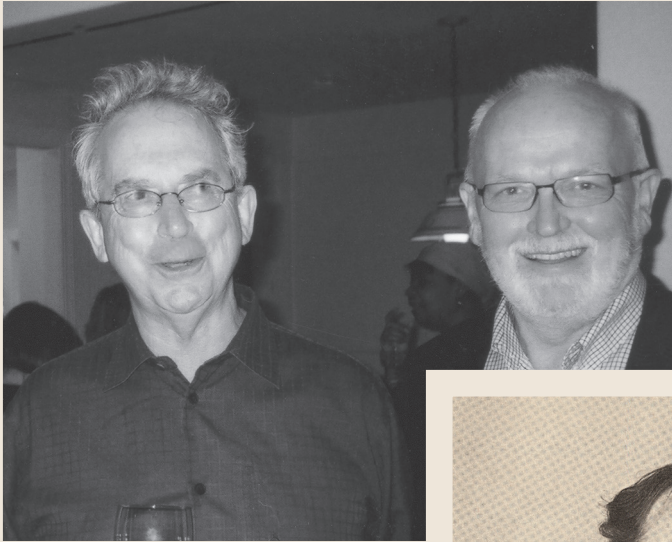
BUT IN ADDITION TO HIS WRITING, Magnuson has held a position that both augments the importance of his archive and ensures his place in any future history of contemporary American literature. He has recently retired after 23 years as director of the James A. Michener Center for Writers at The University of Texas at Austin. During Magnuson's long tenure he guided the Michener Center to prominence as one of a small handful of leading writing programs in the United States. The Michener Center's importance in American literature during the last quarter of the twentieth century cannot be overstated.

It all began, as so often things do, with money. James Michener sold so many books during his long writing career that he single-handedly kept his publisher, Random House, afloat for more than 20 years. Popular as his books were, Michener got little respect or even mention from serious critics of his era. He mixed history in with his fiction so that his readers could enjoy his stories while feeling that they were learning something at the same time. Late in his career he was lured to Texas where he wrote a book called—predictably; Michener wasn't much with titles—*Texas*. But Michener remained living in Austin until his death in 1997. He donated his collection of art to the University of Texas, now housed in the Blanton Museum on campus. And he began to talk to important people in the university administration and in the English department about endowing a writing program.

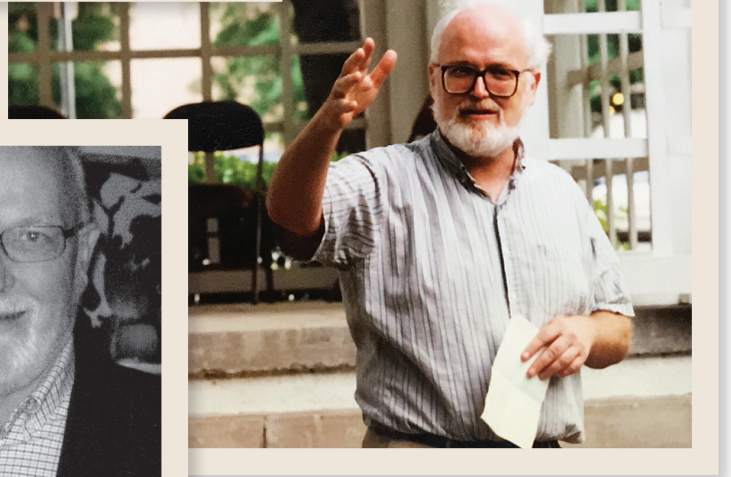
Jim Magnuson, 42 years old, married with two young children, broke, and living in rural Mississippi, managed to snag a job teaching writing at the university. He arrived in Austin in 1985, never having been in Texas before. Two years later an old friend contacted him out of the blue and offered him a job writing for the nighttime television soap opera *Knots Landing*, which had begun floundering in the ratings. Magnuson moved with his family to Los Angeles where he quickly became the workhorse of the writing staff. "I had one mantra in the story meetings," he said later. "It gets worse. No matter how bad things are at the start of a show, it gets worse."

Meanwhile, in Texas things started small. Michener donated \$2 million to the university for a writing center. It offered lectures and attracted a few literary luminaries to the campus. Novelist Rolando Hinojosa-Smith was the director. A little while later, while the Magnusons were still in Los Angeles, Michener added another \$18 million and under Joe Kruppa of the English department and David Cohen of theater and dance, plans were begun to create the Center's own MFA program.

The Magnusons returned to Austin in 1992 where he participated in meetings with Michener and various important figures on the campus about what the Michener Center would be. Michener envisioned an interdisciplinary program that would teach writing fiction, poetry, plays, and screenplays. This was a revolutionary approach at the time and is still



THIS PAGE: James Magnuson with Peter Carey (top left); Magnuson introducing Jesmyn Ward (top right); horsing around with Denis Johnson (middle left); a photograph of Magnuson at age 27; W. S. Merwin with Magnuson at the Harry Ransom Center (bottom left); and speaking at a Michener Center graduation (bottom right). OPPOSITE: Magnuson with James Michener in Michener's backyard in Austin, circa 1992.



PHOTOS: Courtesy of the Michener Center for Writers

unusual. In most programs students work only in one discipline. Magnuson, however, had a varied background. After growing up in Wisconsin and graduating from the University of Wisconsin, he began writing fiction. But after moving east, he had also written plays while on a fellowship at Princeton and spent several years in New York doing street theatre in Harlem. And he had current experience in television and several of his novels were being developed as films.

Finally William Livingston, university vice president and dean of Graduate Studies, called Magnuson into his office and offered him the job as director of what eventually became called

are all available on the Center's website. The Center began meeting in the Perry-Castañeda library, but in 1997, J. Frank Dobie's house on Waller Creek right across the street from the law school became available. The university raised the money to buy it and the offices and meeting rooms of the Center have been there ever since.

Magnuson was careful to have an agreement that allowed him time for his own writing. All during his time as director he spent most mornings at a desk working longhand on legal pads. On Saturdays and Sundays he went to Dobie's house for long hours of work alone. Still, as he approached 75, he began

*First, he began inviting notable writers
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These included J. M. COETZEE, COLM
TÓIBÍN, MARIE HOWE, RICHARD FORD,
GEOFF DYER, and many others.*

the Michener Center for Writers. Magnuson hadn't expected this and was flabbergasted. "Bill," Magnuson finally blurted out, "I'm working for Hollywood money now. You can't afford me." Magnuson was halfway joking, but he held his ground and six weeks later Livingston returned with a sweeter offer and Magnuson accepted.

Magnuson had never thought of himself as an administrator, but now he had become one. And he had to create the process of selecting students, recruit a faculty, and work out the details of the program that the students would follow once they were in Austin. First of all he began inviting notable writers to come to Austin to work with students, sometimes for as long as a semester. Among many others, these included J. M. Coetzee, Colm Toibin, Marie Howe, Richard Ford, Geoff Dyer, and many others. Each person admitted to the program—they are known as Michener fellows—would get a large enough stipend to live on during their three years in Austin. The fellows would work together in seminars and meet privately from time to time with individual faculty. And during their time in Austin the fellows are expected to complete a novel or a play or a screenplay or a cycle of poems. The list of publications, prizes, and awards earned by Michener fellows is too long to list here but they

to worry about finishing the books he still had in mind and realized that the only way he could do so would be to resign from the Michener Center, now under the direction of Bret Anthony Johnston.

In addition to his own notes, novels, and plays—and his novels to come—Magnuson's archives also include his notes, letters, and memorabilia that show him to be a man at the center of a literary network that extended from Austin and his office at the Michener Center to the entire English-speaking world. Just as the Center's Norman Mailer archive, with its abundance of letters and artifacts, is essential to anyone working on the history of American literature from the 1940s to the 1980s, Magnuson's archive will be essential to anyone writing about literature in English during the first two decades of the 21st century. Magnuson was a connector—not the only connector but an important one—of literary figures around the world. He continues to leave a legacy that will never be erased. **R**

Gregory Curtis is the editor of Ransom Center Magazine.

“Ridiculously entertaining.”
—SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

FAMOUS WRITERS I HAVE KNOWN



JAMES MAGNUSON

Book cover of *Famous Writers I Have Known* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2014) by James Magnuson. Magnuson is the former director of the Michener Center for Writers at The University of Texas at Austin, a former Hodder Fellow at Princeton University, the recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship for his fiction, and the winner of the Jesse Jones Award from the Texas Institute of Letters. His papers are housed at the Ransom Center.

EXCERPT

FAMOUS WRITERS I HAVE KNOWN

▼
BY JAMES MAGNUSON

A SMALL TIME CON-MAN is posing as a famously reclusive writer named V. S. Mohle. He manages to get hired by a well-funded graduate writing program at a large university in Texas. Sound familiar? He has never written anything or been in a college classroom. Here's what happens when he teaches his first class:

When I walked into the conference room, everybody was so quiet you would have thought Elvis Presley had just risen from the dead. I could feel them following my every move. I slid into my chair at the head of the table and counted to ten to calm myself, eyeing all the young geniuses. They were a handsome group and Ethel seemed good natured, which they should have been, given the cushy fellowships they were pulling down...

I asked each of them to tell me a few things about what they were reading and writing. One by one they had their say: Mercedes, a former grade school teacher from El Paso, spent the summer tending her parents' dog kennel. Nick, an intense young guy, was working on a series of postmodern fables—whatever the hell they were—based on the Book of Revelation; and LaTasha, who'd been transcribing interviews she'd done with her uncle, a tractor driver in Mississippi.

After each of them finished, I tried to say something encouraging. "Sounds interesting," I would say. When Nick finished about the Book of Revelation, all I could do was point a finger at the boy and go, "Now, that's an idea."

But then I made a mistake. I asked a

slovenly, smirking guy named Mel what he thought. "I'm more interested in stories that take chances," he said. "Stories about rich people getting their feelings hurt don't exactly do it for me."

It was as if he'd just dropped a lit match on a gasoline slick. In an instant the rest of the class was talking over one another.

"What about *The Great Gatsby*? What about Henry James? Tolstoy, for god's sakes," Bryan said. The names of writers I'd never heard of flew like daggers in a martial arts movie—Joyce, Zola, Flaubert, Beckett. LaTasha kept shooting me dismayed glances in my direction as if I was expected to do something.

I slammed my hand down on the table. All their heads came up, like a herd of frightened deer. "Enough! We're here to talk about your stuff, not all this other junk. Everybody talks about what a great writer this Gatsby is. What makes him so great?"

Everything became very quiet. A hand finally went up. It was Mercedes. "Mr. Mohle, the Great Gatsby isn't really a writer. He's a character in a novel."

They were all waiting. It felt like a bad day in front of the parole board. "Good Lord, doesn't anybody recognize a joke when they hear one?"

I pushed up from the table. It was a bit of a grandstand move, stomping off like that, but it was effective. It would have been more effective if I hadn't snagged my toe on Mercedes's backpack and stumbled, but I still made my point.

INSPIRATION AND INSIGHT IN THE PAPERS OF AUTHOR JULIAN BARNES

▼
BY VANESSA GUIGNERY

RIGHT: A draft of the third part of *Metroland* (1984)

ONE : Nude, Giant Girls

Insert theories bit

make immediate ref to Part I: but (how) not boring

~~Sunday morning has always been different. In the first few months of marriage, Marion and I used to spend it in bed, wallowing half in the papers, half in each other; sometimes, with a touch of perverseness, in both at the same time. Now that the first, arguably rather distorting ardours have worn off (I don't mean, you understand, that I love her any the less; in fact, without doubt, it's now something a bit rounder, more textured), we take our pleasures more maturely. I get up early, check that Amy is content, and slip out of the house.~~

less pompous

use bits from p125 about horses

~~So, this Sunday morning, in June 1977, I pick my way across the golf course, watching the early drives catch the dew on their first bounce and pull up quickly, glistening. I like it here; and it's the one place in Northwood where there is enough space to give a different perspective to the views. From high up by the fourth tee, you can follow tiny figures pulling trolleys along the fairway, and bursting into striped colour at the touch of rain. From here, the cries of 'Fo-o-o-ore' seem distant and comic (I smile as I remember Toni's answering bellow of 'Ski-i-i-in').~~

? From

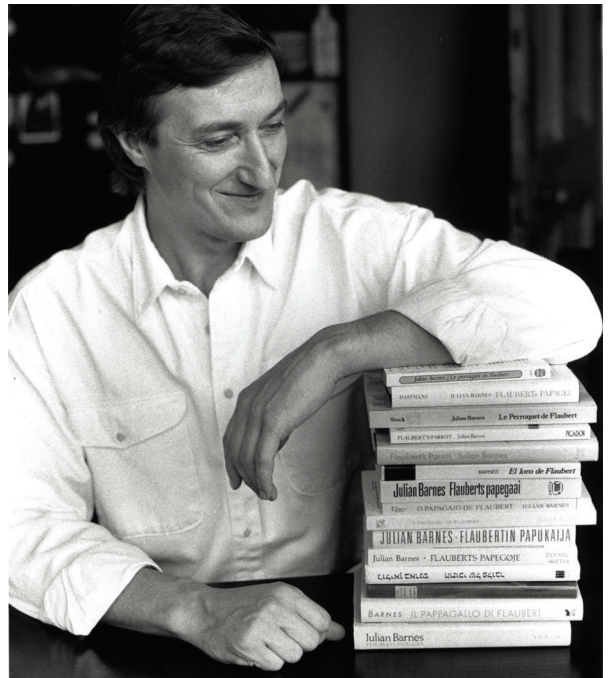
~~Below, smart silver trains clack like muted knitting machines; their windows flash the sun at you, like boys with playground mirrors. Churches remind other people to get up and pray. [This is the place and time I use for thinking; here you get different perspectives on other things as well.]~~

Insert remembered bits

~~I suppose it's ironic to find myself in Northwood, Eastwold and virtually indistinguishable from it. As a boy, I might have regarded it as spiritual suicide. As a young man, standing beside Marion outside Kennington Register Office, and trying to get my smile right as there would be no second chance, I would still have found it surprising. But a year ago, with Amy on the way, inner London house prices on the rise, and none of the uninformed idealism of adolescence, I found it sensible, almost natural. [Whatever the public image of Metroland, it still combines, as Marion pointed out to me, the best of the town with the best of the country. An efficient record shop stands next to a grocer's which sells eggs with shit and straw on them. There's a decent place for Marion to get her hair done; yet two minutes' walk away you can see real pigs mucking up a field. Five minutes'~~

compress

As a kid you're



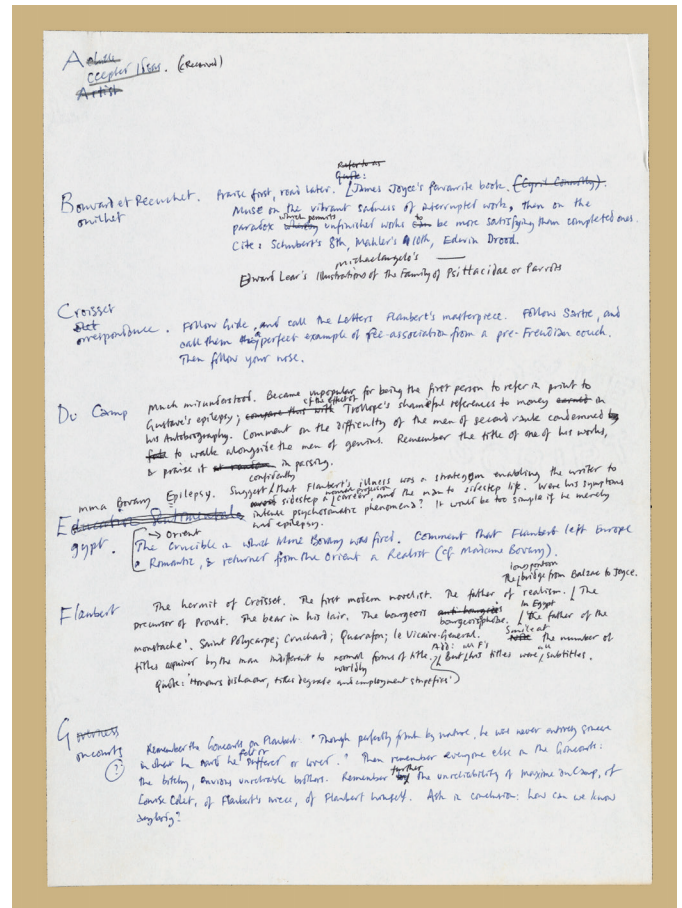
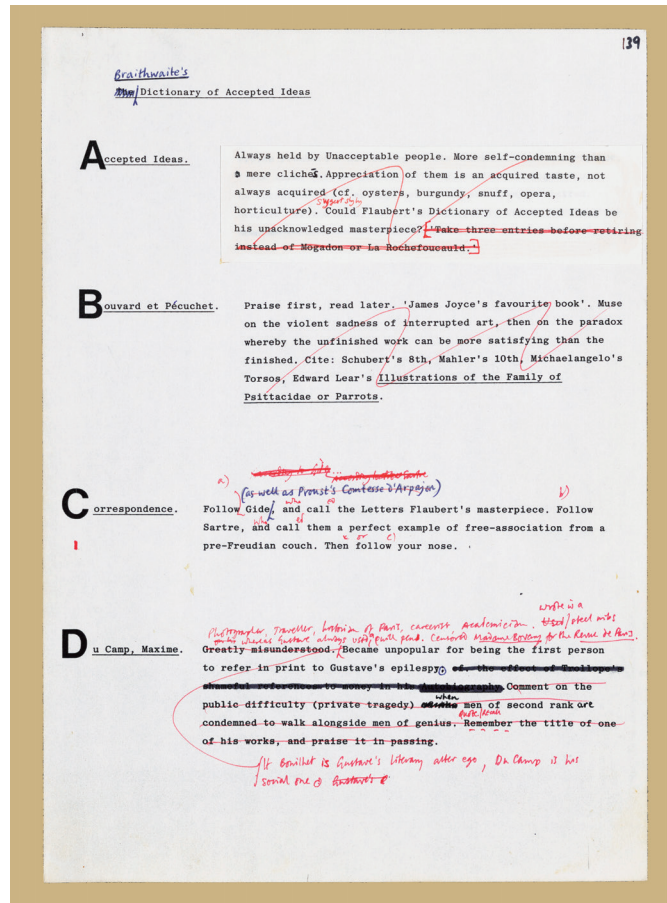
Julian Barnes is the author of several books of stories, essays, and numerous novels, including the Booker Prize-winning novel *The Sense of an Ending* and the acclaimed *The Noise of Time*. His most recent book *The Man in the Red Coat* was published in the U.S. in 2020.

n the fall of 2001, I was in Normandy with author Julian Barnes to take part in an event around his most successful novel, *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), when he told me with a wry smile that I would soon be going to Austin, Texas. As I looked at him quizzically, he explained that he had decided to place his archive at the Harry Ransom Center. At that time, I had completed my doctoral thesis on "Postmodernism and modes of blurring in Julian Barnes's fiction" at the University of La Sorbonne in Paris and published books and articles of literary analysis of Barnes's work, but I had never examined a writer's archive and I had never been to the United States.

AFTER GIVING IT SOME THOUGHT, I applied for a fellowship at the Ransom Center, and in March of 2006, I spent a wonderful month in the reading room going through the first acquisition of Barnes's papers. I had looked at the catalog online beforehand and had planned to go through each of the 20 boxes that covered Barnes's published work from his first novel, *Metroland* (1980), to his 10th, *Love, etc.* (2000). I was also intrigued by the mention of handwritten notebooks and of an unpublished *Literary Guide to Oxford*, completed in the 1970s, and by the enticing folder titled "Letters from writers."

The papers relating to the unpublished Guide to Oxford showed how meticulous Barnes was in his methods of research from early on in his career but also how impatient he grew as his publisher kept postponing the project, until Barnes decided to withdraw it altogether. The letters from writers were relatively few because Barnes decided not to include letters from people who are still alive, but I was thrilled to read Philip Larkin's letter of April 20, 1980, praising Barnes's novel *Metroland* and the younger writer's enthusiastic note on the envelope: "BLOODY MARVELLOUS." I smiled when reading Kingsley Amis's postcard sent to Barnes's wife, Pat Kavanagh, on January 6, 1984: "What a lovely party.... Tell J. sorry I showed boredom over *Flaubert's Parrot*—sure it will be in the book."

The two handwritten notebooks dating from the late 1970s and early 1980s proved extraordinary as they contain plans



Handwritten and typed drafts from papers associated with *Flaubert's Parrot*, 1984.

and notes for books that were eventually written and published, but also miscellaneous sentences, anecdotes, and ideas for short stories and novels that were never written. Under the title "Novels I want to write" appeared brief indications that announced his second and fourth novels: The "sexual jealousy novel" was to be *Before She Met Me* (1982), and the "WW2 novel" would become *Staring at the Sun* (1986). The third description "Praise of younger man/older woman relationship" did not seem to correspond to any published piece when I read it in 2006 but then perfectly fit the plot of *The Only Story*, Barnes's 13th novel published in 2018.

In a similar way, I was intrigued by a recurrent sentence in the notebooks—"Let's get this death thing straight"—which the writer had planned as the first line to his "future novel about Death." However, the sentence did not appear in any book until his essay/memoir *Nothing to Be Frightened Of* was published some 30 years later in 2008. I realized how precious archives were in the long term, especially for someone such as Julian Barnes who defines himself as "a slow-burn writer" and once remarked, "Things tend to have to compost down and I store things up without knowing that that's what I'm doing."

I would reread these two precious early notebooks several times in the subsequent years to look for clues to future work. Since that first visit, I have returned to the Ransom Center

every year to work on the next acquisitions of Barnes's archive (processed in 2006 and 2015), but also to examine the archives of other contemporary writers, specifically Anita Desai, Zulfikar Ghose, Ian McEwan, and Kazuo Ishiguro.

Gradually, I became more efficient and focused in my handling of the material. During my first visit, I did not follow any systematic methodology and took notes only on what I found interesting without any specific project in mind. At that time, cameras were not allowed in the reading room and so one had to choose very carefully which pages to select for photocopies to be made by the Center staff. After accumulating about 500 pages of notes on and off over 10 years, I finally knew that I

**IT'S ODD HOW,
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—JULIAN BARNES

wanted to write a book about Julian Barnes's creative process through an analysis of the genesis of his various projects.

I went through the boxes of the three acquisitions yet again, but this time with a different eye and perspective. I knew I could not be exhaustive, but in the genetic dossiers for each of Barnes's books, I looked for the story that would be interesting to tell.

As Barnes's writing processes have varied throughout his career, I let myself be inspired by the material contained in the archive rather than developing a method that I would homogeneously apply to each book.

Among the most interesting discoveries was that of the trajectory of Barnes's Booker Prize-winning novel, *The Sense of*

an Ending (2011), which he had initially conceived as reviving the background and characters of his first novel, *Metroland*, published 30 years earlier. However, when he moved from handwritten draft to typescript, he made the drastic decision to change all the names and delete all the echoes between the two books so that they now stand (almost) completely apart.

My work in the archive was far from solitary as Julian Barnes always generously and patiently answered my queries or reacted to the emails I sent him while conducting research in the reading room.

One day in January 2017, as I was sharing with him passages he had crossed out in a draft written more than a quarter of a century before and had forgotten about, he wrote to me: "It's odd how, as you proceed towards the final version of the book, your mind/memory seems to wipe out all the false starts you made and blind alleys you went up. So they come as a complete surprise when a French Professor turns them up."

Vanessa Guignery is Professor of Contemporary English and Postcolonial Literature at the École Normale Supérieure de Lyon, France, and author of Julian Barnes from the Margins Exploring the Writer's Archives (Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

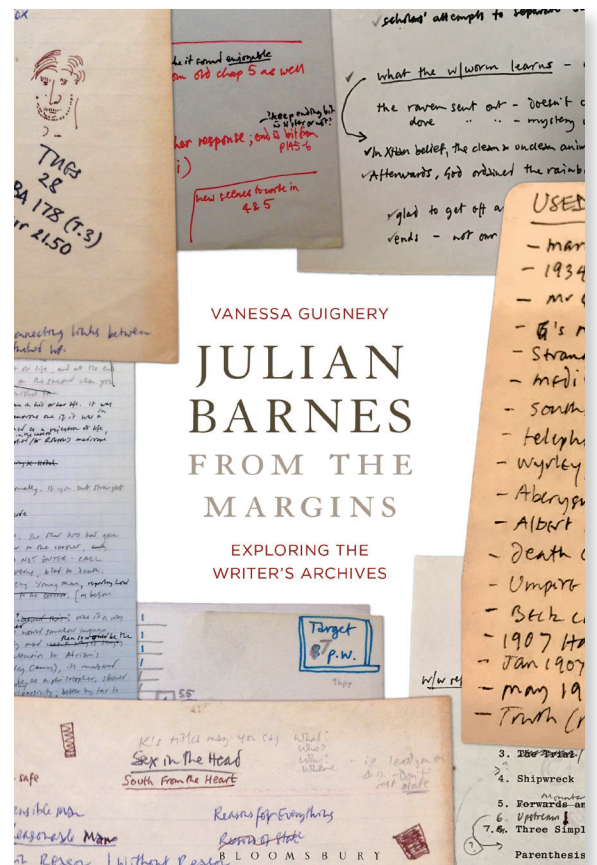


Scholar Vanessa Guignery at work in the Ransom Center in 2016.

EXCERPT

Julian Barnes From the Margins: Exploring the Writer's Archives

BY VANESSA GUIGNERY



The archives for each of Barnes’s novels reveal a composition pattern that starts with various notes about what to include, followed by several drafts containing longhand revisions and deletions, until a complete draft is sent to Barnes’s friend Dame Hermione Lee for comments, which leads to more revisions. In 2000, Barnes told an interviewer: “Normally I type on an IBM 196c, then hand correct again and again until it’s virtually illegible, then clean type it, then hand correct again and again. And so on.” The novelist firmly believes that writing is in the rewriting. Therefore, “Writing the first draft is usually a great illusion. The first draft makes you think that the telling of this story, whatever it is, is a fairly blithe and easy business. Then you realize you’ve fooled yourself yet again. Then the work, the real writing starts.” The numerous corrections on Barnes’s manuscripts and typescripts attest to how carefully and relentlessly he hones his style and concurs with Flaubert for whom “prose is like hair—it shines with combing.” Therefore, as

he points out, “quite substantial things can be changed ... even quite late in the day”—be it the name of the characters, the use of tenses or even part of the structure—and “the book can always be improved.”

In some cases, Barnes deconstructs his own text to make sure the scat-

WRITING THE FIRST DRAFT IS USUALLY A GREAT ILLUSION.

—JULIAN BARNES

tered elements about a character make a coherent story. Thus, after finishing a first draft of *Flaubert’s Parrot*, he wrote a note to himself: “read through the Braithwaite bits and see if they make a narrative.” He used a similar method

for *Talking It Over* when he feared Gillian’s voice was being “drowned out” by the voices of the male characters in the competing monologues: “I simply took all the pages out and read her story as her story all the way through. ... it’s good to feel the novel physically coming apart like that and then laying it back in place.” He adopted the same technique for the story of Martha Cochrane in *England, England* in order to achieve the right balance “between the personal intimate life realistically treated, and the large, semi-farcical story of the island:” “When I wasn’t sure whether it was working or not, I simply extracted from the draft of the book all the sections dealing with Martha’s personal life, and then rewrote them as a sort of individual story. Then put them back into the book and made the necessary adjustments.” Asked when he feels he has reached the final version of the book, he replies: “When I find that the changes I’m making are dis-improving my text as much as improving it. Then I know it’s time to wave good-bye.”



Unlocking sound stories through audio digitization

▼
BY KATHERINE QUANZ

RECORDED SOUND HAS A WAY OF BRINGING HISTORY TO LIFE—we are able to eavesdrop on meetings and interviews, hear our favorite authors dictate their notes, and sit in on rehearsals of performances. However, we can only hear these events if we are able to play the media on which the sound is stored. That is why the Ransom Center embarked on a massive digitization project in 2018 funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

Unlocking Sound Stories provides access to more than 3,000 recordings, including those by T. S. Eliot, Paul Bowles, Pablo Picasso, and other notable 20th-century figures, that originally were recorded in a variety of formats—cassette tapes, reel-to-reel audio tapes, phonograph discs, and many more. On one recording, famed photographer David Douglas Duncan asks artist Pablo Picasso to sing his childhood lullaby.

Another set of recordings includes both a rehearsal and performance of the musical *Blitz!*, which was written by Lionel Bart and first opened at London's Adelphi Theatre in West End in 1962.

About 30 phonodiscs were preserved featuring recordings of T. S. Eliot reading his poems “The Hollow Men” and “Gerontion,” the N. Y. Producing Association’s 1931 production of “Hamlet,” and Paul Bowles’s operetta “The Wind Remains.”

This is part of a strategic effort that began in 2001 to digitize the Ransom Center’s 15,000 audio recordings. Now, more than 6,000 digital files are accessible to patrons in the reading room.

Katherine Quanz coordinated the NEH Audio Digitization Project generously funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

ME FIRST

BY BILLY COLLINS

We often fly in the sky together,
and we're always okay—there's our luggage now
waiting for us on the carousel.

And we drive lots of places
in all manner of hectic traffic,
yet here we are pulling in the driveway again.

So many opportunities to die together,
but no meteor has hit our house,
no tornado has lifted us into its funnel.

The odds say then that one of us will go
before the other, like heading off
into a heavy snow storm, leaving

the other one behind to stand in the kitchen
or lie on the bed under the fan.
So why not let me, the older one, go first?

I don't want to see you everywhere
as I wait for the snow to stop,
before setting out with a crooked stick, calling your name.

—Poem excerpted from *Whale Day and Other Poems* (Penguin Random House, 2020) © Billy Collins.

WHALE DAY

And Other Poems



BILLY COLLINS

New York Times bestselling author of *THE RAIN IN PORTUGAL*

Billy Collins is one of the most widely read poets in America, and his witty, conversational poems illuminate the poignant details that often go unnoticed in everyday life. Within his archive at the Ransom Center are notebooks, drafts, proofs, and other documents relating to his poetry, essays, and other published works. His archive includes travel diaries, datebooks, sketchbooks and drawings, childhood writings, teaching materials, correspondence, and other materials that document his life and career.



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ABOVE: Eli Reed, *Million Man March, Washington, D.C., 1995*. Image courtesy of Magnum Photos, Inc. © Eli Reed/Magnum Photos; FRONT COVER: When he lived in Brooklyn, New York, Reed photographed his neighbor's nephew, Thomas Cobb Jr., standing with his aunt's hands on his shoulders a few days before Thanksgiving. Eli Reed, *Thomas Cobb, Brooklyn, New York, 1990s*. © Eli Reed